

The secretary of the church office helps the church function by acting as a personal secretary to the pastor and by maintaining the church office.

Common Practices

The size and budget of the church determine who performs secretarial duties. In small churches, a church member often is recruited as a volunteer to work a few hours a week so that the pastor doesn't have to perform all the secretarial duties. In other churches, there is a paid church secretary who works part or full time.

Secretaries need to receive fair compensation and benefits, such as Social Security. Ask your conference or association office about guidelines.

Responsibilities

The following responsibilities will be handled in a variety of ways in churches. You may have the responsibility of:

- Coordinating the pastor's schedule. Although sometimes the pastor may handle his or her own schedule, it is important for you to know how to get in touch with the pastor and to convey messages about people seeking appointments.
- Acting as a receptionist. As secretary you reflect the attitudes of the church. You are the first (or only) person that members,

salespersons, homeless persons or others see or hear when they come to or call the church. You need to be able to answer all kinds of questions about your church's history and program, about the United Church of Christ and about any outside groups that use your buildings.

- Listening to someone's troubles.
- Scheduling church activities.
- Scheduling use of church buildings by church and outside groups. You'll need to be aware of policies about the use of the buildings.
- Keeping people informed about the church schedule. You may need to contact the custodian, choir director or organist about activities that will include them. You may prepare a church schedule for the newsletter to inform other members.
- Assisting the pastor in all secretarial and clerical work.
- Assisting the church school, governing board and other organizations. You may type and distribute reports and minutes of meetings or coordinate the work of volunteers in doing so. Occasionally you may attend meetings and take minutes. You may type and duplicate such items as church school programs; youth activity announcements; confirmation schedules; constitutions and forms for preschools, cemeteries or room use. You also may serve as a

contact between organizations and the church staff.

- Collecting information for church bulletins, typing, duplicating and folding them.
- Collecting information for bulk mailings and duplicating, stapling, folding and mailing them. These may be letters or a regular newsletter. A newsletter editor may prepare the copy for the newsletter which you type, or you may be responsible for editing the newsletter, with the help of the pastor.
- Keeping official church records of baptisms, membership, weddings and funerals and filling out appropriate certificates.
- Maintaining church mailing lists.
- Filing correspondence, bulletins, and minutes of church committees and organizations.
- Ordering office supplies, church bulletins, offering envelopes and altar candles.
- Maintaining the schedule for altar flowers and ordering them or reminding people of their responsibility.
- Coordinating and supervising the work of volunteers, particularly those who help with office duties.
- Attending staff meetings.
- Acting as church bookkeeper by posting and acknowledging contributions, paying bills, handling the payroll and preparing financial reports.

Skills and Attributes Needed

- Ability to type and use the church's computer system and use basic office machines.
- Warmth, sensitivity and concern for people.
- Courtesy.
- Ability to listen.
- Ability to get along with many people.
- Ability to handle a variety of tasks at one time.
- Ability to maintain confidentiality.
- Ability to set priorities.
- Understanding of and enthusiasm for the church's programs.
- Good self-image.
- Pleasant voice and neat appearance.
- Ability to maintain awareness of what is occurring in the church.
- Dependability.
- Respect for other staff members and the ability to gain their respect.
- Ability to be impartial about the way the church carries out its business.

Ways to Increase Skills, Knowledge and Effectiveness

- Ask for a position description outlining responsibilities, expectations and accountability.

Secretary of the Church Office

- Attend the annual meeting of the UCC Office Support Staff Network to continue your education, meet others from throughout the church, and network with other church support staff persons. Some events are held in regions and conferences, as well. Look in the **UCC Desk Calendar and Plan Book** for the address of the UCC Office Support Staff Network.
- Attend workshops sponsored by the National Association of Church Business Administration (7001 Grapevine Highway, Suite 324, Fort Worth, TX 76180) or organizations for church secretaries.
- Take a basic bookkeeping course. Ask for instruction from a church member who is an accountant or bookkeeper.
- Have a good dictionary and secretary's handbook, church constitution and history, conference directory of churches, and **Year Book** of the United Church of Christ—and use them when in doubt.
- Read your church newsletter, local newspaper, conference paper and United Church News, which can be ordered from The Office of General Ministries, 700 Prospect Avenue, Cleveland, OH 44115.
- Get acquainted with other pastors and church secretaries.
- Make a list of your duties divided into daily, weekly, monthly, annual and on-demand categories and confer with your supervisor about them.
- Be clear to whom you are accountable. Usually that will be the senior pastor, but it may be an administrator or the governing board. This will help you deal with church members who think they are your supervisors.
- Take a course in how to operate the church's computer and request adequate reference books and software to meet the church's needs.
- Assure there is adequate office machinery to do the job easily and neatly.
- Make schedules so that people know when to submit material to you. How many days before a meeting do you need to have the agenda? By what day of the week must announcements, music and sermon topics be ready for the bulletin?
- Use the **UCC Desk Calendar and Plan Book** to alert you to upcoming events and times for ordering materials.
- Use **SAMUEL** (Scripture and Mission: A United Church of Christ Electronic Library), available at ucc.org. Included are lectionary texts, Mission Moments, and Stewardship Messages for use in bulletins or newsletters, national staff directory, and catalog entries. Or order from United Church of Christ Resources. Telephone toll-free 800-537-3394.

Issues Facing the Church

- The secretary hears all kinds of rumors, comments on sermons and programs and complaints about the way the pastor's time is being spent. How can the secretary be helpful without being a tale bearer? What is the role of confidentiality?
- When the secretary is a member of the church, the expectations often are different. How do you sort out what is done because you are church secretary and what is done because you are a church member?
- Church secretaries in the past have often been underpaid. Do you feel personnel policies are adequate? To whom should you talk if you don't? (Read the 1987 General Synod resolution "United Church of Christ Secretaries/Support Staff just Employment Practices," pages 80-81, from the **Minutes** of the 16th General Synod. Check with your church or conference office for the **Minutes**.)
- Is the church secretary first the secretary to the pastor or staff and then to the church as a whole?

Questions

- What are your responsibilities as church secretary?
- Are there any duties for which you feel you aren't adequately prepared? Which would you like to work on first and how can you go about it?

- To whom are you accountable and who is accountable to you?